



ESTABLISHMENT, ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

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National Aboriginal Conference



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**NATIONAL
ABORIGINAL
CONFERENCE**

**ESTABLISHMENT,
ROLE
AND
FUNCTIONS**

(Revised March 1983)

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Background	6
Committee Membership	7
Current Membership	8, 9
NAC Area Boundaries	10
Membership of NAC	11
Role of Members	12
National Conference	13
State Branches	14
National Executive Committee	15
Election	15

INTRODUCTION

The National Aboriginal Conference was established by the Federal Government in 1977 to provide a forum for the expression of Aboriginal views.

The Conference succeeded the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee which was created in 1973.

Election of NAC members took place on November 12, 1977 with 35 successful candidates, representing electorates throughout Australia, taking their seats as from November 28.

The election was conducted by the Australian Electoral Office in conjunction with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

In early 1978, the NAC Secretariat replaced an interim unit that operated within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

On October 26, 1978, the National Aboriginal Conference became the first Aboriginal body to be incorporated under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976-78, being registered as the Aboriginal Corporation of the National Aboriginal Conference.

The number of NAC members increased in October 1980 to 36 with the election of a Tasmanian representative.

A second general election took place on October 17, 1981, with successful candidates taking office on October 28 of that year.

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BACKGROUND

The National Aboriginal conference evolved from a series of Aboriginal organisations that came into being after the second world war.

That period saw the Australian Government experiment with successive policies of protectionism, assimilation and integration towards Aboriginals while the States continued to enact legislation as part of their Aboriginal management policies.

In May 1967, following pressure from Aboriginal organisations, the Federal Government conducted a national referendum in which 91 per cent of voters favoured changes to the Australian Constitution that would give the Federal Government responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs.

Following the referendum, the Government created an office of Aboriginal Affairs to which four Aboriginals were appointed as public servants. The States reacted by forming their own Aboriginal Advisory Councils.

In 1972 a new Federal Government established the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and appointed a Minister to head the department. The Minister, in February 1973, convened a national conference of Aboriginals from throughout Australia which was referred to as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee.

The election of 41 delegates to the NACC, representing Aboriginal people in as many electorates, took place on November 24 of that year.

Another change of Government in 1975 saw the NACC subject to an enquiry under the chairmanship of Dr L.R. Hiatt with his report tabled in Parliament in November 1976.

In May of the following year, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs announced that as a result of the enquiry the NACC would be replaced by the National Aboriginal Conference.

Despite a report recommendation that the number of electorates be increased from 41 to 46 they were reduced to 35. This was increased to 36 in October 1980.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE:

National Chairman:	Mr Roy Nichols TSA
New South Wales	Mr Ossie Cruse NSB Mr Lyall Munro NSF
Western Australia	Mr Rob Riley WAA Mr Peter Yu WAF
South Australia	Mr Garnet Wilson SAA
Northern Territory	Mr Willy Clayton NTA Mr Don Weibenanga NTB
Victoria/Tasmania	Mrs Nessie Skuta VCB
Queensland	Mr Patrick Malone QEC Mr Ray Robinson QEB Mr George Mye QEI

STATE CHAIRPERSONS:

New South Wales	Mr Bill Smith NSA
Western Australia	Mr Rob Riley WAA
South Australia	Mr Garnet Wilson SAA
Northern Territory	Mr Vince Forrester NTG
Tasmania/Victoria	Mrs Merle Jackomos VCA
Queensland	Mr Steve Man QEA

EXECUTIVE DELEGATION:

Management Committee	Chairman Mr R. Nichols TSA Deputy Chairman Mr R. Riley WAA Secretary General Mr G. Paulson Subject Delegate (as under)
Land Rights	Mr Ossie Cruse NSB
Makarrata	Mr Lyall Munro NSF
Cultural Heritage	Mr Peter Yu WAF Mr Don Weibenanga NTB
Education	Mr Patrick Malone QEC
WCIP	Mr Roy Nichols NSA
Housing	Mr Garnet Wilson SAA
Legal Services	Mr Ray Robinson QEB
Charter/Boundaries	Mr Rob Riley WAA
Social Welfare/ Employment/Youth	Mr Willy Clayton NTA
Health/Child Care/ Women's Affairs	Mrs Nessie Skuta VCB

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE NAC

Membership of the National Aboriginal Conference is restricted to Aboriginal persons over the age of 18 years who have been permanent residents of the areas in which they stand for election for a period of not less than six months.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is the sole authority on the number of members and the boundaries of areas which members represent.

A member may cease to be a member of the National Aboriginal Conference before the expiration of the three year term of office by resignation or by declaration of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, after consultation with the National Executive Committee, that the member is no longer fit to hold office on grounds of conviction for a criminal offence, gross neglect of duties or ill health.

Casual vacancies arising from such action, or from death of a member, are filled by election or by other means approved by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in consultation with the relevant State Branch.

ROLE OF MEMBERS

The members of the National Aboriginal Conference are required to analyse, interpret and articulate the felt needs and views of the Aboriginal people in their electorate and represent their constituents at community, State and National level.

Members are required to liaise with Government departments and agencies and to be available to advise organisations and individuals on formulation of requests for assistance or advice. They also take part in consultation on aid programmes at community, area and regional levels.

Additionally, members are required to interpret Government policy and programmes to Aboriginal people who have difficulty in understanding them; advise constituents as to their rights; refer them to appropriate agencies and monitor the progress of Government policy in relation to matters like health, education, employment, social security, land rights and the like.

Each member attends State Branch meetings at least twice a year usually held in varying electorates within the State. Once each year members are required to travel to Canberra for the National Conference, an annual meeting of all NAC members. If a member is elected to represent the State on the National Executive Committee, that member is also required to attend four meetings a year in Canberra.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The National Conference, or Annual General Meeting, of the National Aboriginal Conference is held to review the work of the National Executive Committee during the previous twelve months. It can recommend reconsideration or rescission of previous decisions of the Executive though such recommendations are not binding on the Executive.

The Annual General Meeting receives and considers reports and recommendations from State Branches (through the National Executive Committee) and from the National Executive itself, and can make recommendations to both.

Additionally, the Annual General Meeting can set up committees to consider recommendations received, while the AGM is in progress. It can request reports from the Chairman of the National Executive or State Branch Chairmen.

The Annual General Meeting can, through the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, request information from the Federal Government.

Following the 1981 election, the Annual General Meeting assumed the responsibility of electing a National Chairperson – a task previously undertaken annually by the Executive Committee.

STATE BRANCHES

Members of the National Aboriginal Conference elected in a State or Territory constitute a State Branch (except that Victorian and Tasmanian members make one branch).

Membership of State Branches is:

Queensland	9
Western Australia	7
Northern Territory	7
New South Wales	7
South Australia	3
Victoria/Tasmania	3

State Branches meet at least twice each year and elect a State Chairperson and Deputy State Chairperson annually.

Functions of the State Branches are:

- (a) To elect delegates to the National Executive Committee.
- (b) To propose matters for discussion and action at National level.
- (c) To form and maintain working relationships with other Aboriginal Organisations, Regional Offices of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and State and Commonwealth Government Departments.
- (d) To consider reports from State delegates on the National Executive Committee.
- (e) To advise the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on matters referred to him by delegates through their State Branch.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members of the National Executive Committee are chosen by State Branches from among their members as follows:

Queensland	3	(one of whom represents the Torres Strait area).
Western Australia	2	(one of whom represents a tribal region).
Northern Territory	2	
New South Wales	2	
South Australia	1	
Victoria/Tasmania	1	

The functions of the National Executive Committee are:

- (a) To direct the activities of the Conference Secretariat including financial management and employment of staff.
- (b) To put the views and needs of the Aboriginal people before the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and other interested groups and individuals.
- (c) To prepare for Annual General Meetings of the NAC.
- (d) To prepare and distribute a newsletter.
- (e) To comment on the Annual Report of the Aboriginal Development Commission.

ELECTIONS

Conducted by the Australian Electoral office each three years or at the discretion of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

National Aboriginal Conference Documents

AIATSIS Library, P NAT

"NAC – establishment, role and functions" Revised March 1983.

National Aboriginal Conference

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